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RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHROV RUEHTRO
DE RUEHNJ #0586/01 3411820
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 071820Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7491
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 NDJAMENA 000586

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CHAD POISED FOR CREDIBLE LEGISLATIVE AND MUNICIPAL
ELECTIONS IN 2010: AN AUGUST 13 ACCORD PROCESS UPDATE

REF: A. NDJAMENA 458
[B](#). NDJAMENA 441
[C](#). NDJAMENA 410

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#). (SBU) Chad is now poised to hold credible legislative and municipal elections in 2010. The process of implementing the August 13, 2007 Accord has produced positive results, and many of the essential building blocks for elections are in place. On December 4 President Deby put the full weight of the GoC and his personal prestige on the line behind the goal of credible 2010 contests. Nothing, however, is guaranteed, and much still needs to be done as time grows short. But there is no objective reason why credible elections cannot be held here within a year. The obstacles are political, including opposition party reticence, institutional incapacity and lack of leadership, and legislative and bureaucratic lethargy. The potential for violence as the electoral campaign itself unfolds will grow, reinforced by the conflictual nature of Chadian politics and the society it reflects. The Chadians have managed to get as far as they have thanks to the willingness of their democratic partners -- the USG, France, Germany, Switzerland, the EU, AU, UN and OIF -- to advise and support them, politically and financially. Continued commitment on the part of these partners will be essential to reaching the goal of credible legislative/municipal elections before the end of 2010.

[2](#). (SBU) The USG has assisted the process thus far by funding this summer's demographic census; sponsoring ongoing conflict mitigation and resolution projects in wide areas of the country; encouraging journalist professionalism and "community radio stations"; and producing radio spots on electoral awareness and voter responsibility. Promotion of democracy and good governance is the primary non-crisis strategic goal of USG policy in Chad (ranking along with humanitarian assistance in Eastern Chad as long as the Darfur crisis continues). We intend to remain engaged both bilaterally and in harness with our international partners to advance Chad's progress toward the goal of credible elections in 2010. We play a leading role in the informal assistance and support group of Chad's international partners

(see para 10 below) and USAID experts are here now to advise us on how to program USDOLS five million for elections and conflict mitigation over the coming electoral cycles.

13. (SBU) The strong personal and very public commitment of President Deby to the electoral process is particularly significant because although his constitutional position will be not affected by the 2010 polling (whatever the result), his political position will definitely impacted by the results of local and legislative elections. We believe that President Deby seeks credible 2010 elections both to burnish his democratic credentials with the international community, and to solidify his own political position within Chad. This means not only strengthening his ability to win another presidential run in 2011 (if he chooses to run) or to hand-pick a successor (if he does not), but also reinforcing his position within his own Zaghawa ethnic group, Bidayet Clan, and Itno family, from which he draws his influence but from which could come the most serious threat to his own hold on power. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

CREDIBLE ELECTIONS IN CHAD:
POSSIBLE BUT NOT GUARANTEED

14. (SBU) The Chadian government and political parties have announced that they intend to hold legislative and municipal elections in 2010. The long and slow process of implementing the August 13, 2007 Accord aimed at electoral and political reform has produced positive results. Many of the essential building blocks of the electoral edifice are in place -- an

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Electoral Reform Committee (ERC); a new Government of National Unity open to opposition parties; enabling legislation; a demographic census; and an Independent Electoral Commission (CENI). President Deby has put the weight of the GoC and his personal prestige behind the goal of the 2010 contests, for his own political ends, by convoking all political parties December 4 to forge a general consensus in favor of credible, non-biometric legislative and municipal elections before the end of 2010. The President expressed his concern that delaying elections would create a legal void and deny the "legitimate aspirations" of the Chadian people. Leading opposition figures welcomed the President's remarks and said they believed that with the support of the body politic, there would be a credible vote. They urged public support for the CENI and efforts to improve of the security and media environment relating to the elections. The CENI President expressed his thanks for the President's leadership and said he looked forward to moving the electoral process forward toward a vote.

15. (SBU) Nothing is guaranteed, however, and much still needs to be done: a Permanent Board of Elections must be formed; an electoral census must be conducted and constituencies drawn up; voter registration and vetting of lists of candidates are needed, among other prerequisites. These tasks will not be easy to accomplish and time is running short. Still, there is no objective reason why credible elections cannot be held here within a year. The obstacles to holding them as scheduled are political, including continued reticence on the part of some in the opposition to participate because they fear they will lose; lack of capacity, especially lack of leadership, on the part of Chad's nascent electoral infrastructure, in particular the CENI; as well as legislative and bureaucratic lethargy. The potential for violence as the electoral campaign itself unfolds will grow, reinforced by the conflictual nature of Chadian politics and the society it reflects.

16. (SBU) The Chadians have managed to get as far as they have thanks to the willingness of their democratic partners -- France, Germany, Switzerland, the EU, AU, UN and OIF, in addition to the U.S. -- to advise, support, finance, and

accompany them politically. Continued commitment on the part of these partners will be essential to reaching the goal of credible legislative/municipal elections before the end of 2010. The U.S. has assisted thus far by funding the 2009 demographic census, conflict mitigation/resolution projects and initiatives to promote professionalism among journalists.

Encouragement of democracy and good governance is the primary non-crisis goal of the USG in Chad. We intend to remain engaged, both bilaterally and in harness with our international partners, to advance this goal with respect to elections.

IMPLEMENTING THE AUGUST 13 ACCORD

17. (SBU) The August 13 Accord, signed between the GOC, President Deby's majority Patriotic Salvation Movement (MPS) party coalition and a group of opposition parties in 2007, aimed to encourage reconciliation between the government and its various opponents and to lay out formal processes for future elections. (The current Chadian constitution calls for presidential elections five years from the previous vote, which occurred in 2006.) Many of the goals of the August Accord have now been achieved, starting with the formation in late 2007 of a multi-party steering committee, called the Electoral Reform Committee (ERC), to oversee the political reform process laid out in the Accord. In May 2008, based on requirements in the Accord, President Deby named a new government, which brought opposition figures into key cabinet positions, including that of the Prime Minister. In the summer of 2009, a population census was held -- a precursor to an electoral census -- and an Electoral Code was passed by the National Assembly, along with a charter on entitlements and responsibilities of political parties, and legislation to

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limit proliferation of splinter parties. Later in the summer, an Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) was named, 15 of whose members represent the MPS and 15 the opposition, with the Chair able to cast deciding votes.

WHAT REMAINS TO BE DONE

18. (SBU) The CENI, composed of party activists rather than impartial individuals competent to organize an election, has been prone to deadlock since it began meeting this September.

Its efforts to develop electoral timelines and consider modalities for an electoral census broke down along party lines very early, with many opposition members calling for a delayed timetable. President Deby convoked party leaders December 4 to spur action, and the CENI met the following day to declare that all of its membership was committed to legislative and municipal elections in 2010 and that the group had adopted, by consensus, the notion of a "computerized electoral census," thus ending a protracted debate on whether to use an expensive biometric process favored by the opposition as a means of postponing a vote. Conducting the computerized census will have to be done fairly soon so that a voter registration campaign can begin. Other outstanding tasks include formation of a Permanent Bureau of Elections, vetting of candidates and establishment of candidate lists, and improvements in the media climate for elections.

19. (SBU) The ERC continues to meet to encourage achievement of the last outstanding element of the August 13 Accord: promotion of general political dialogue. The body, which includes MPS and opposition figures as well as observer seats for international reps, has been going about this task by undertaking "sensitization campaigns" in the countryside on citizens' entitlements and responsibilities, particularly with regard to voting. Although the ERC might arguably be viewed as redundant were the CENI able to function more

effectively, the ERC's success at acting as a bipartisan champion of political dialogue has earned it support from the international community.

INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS GROUP FORMED

¶10. (SBU) International players from democratic nations and entities (the USG, UN, EU, AU, OIF, France, Germany, and Switzerland) have constituted themselves as an informal assistance and support group to advance the election process in Chad. We have been meeting regularly in recent weeks to plan our common effort. The French are extremely engaged and proactive, and are playing a leadership role in getting others in the international community to endorse and support our aims. The EU, which was the main mover behind the August 13 Accord, has provided the bulk of financial assistance to the electoral process thus far, and is deeply committed to helping Chad meet minimal standards for electoral credibility. The OIF has much expertise to offer, given the similar legal underpinnings of Chadian political arrangements and those in French-speaking nations with longer democratic traditions. The UN, despite concerns that elections may prove difficult to stage in locations where neither the GoC nor traditional leaders are able to ensure security, has already provided several teams of technical experts and will place additional personnel on the CENI and other bodies in need of advice. The AU says it wants to give Chad a chance to become an African electoral success.

AS FOR THE OPPOSITION

¶11. (SBU) It is important to bear in mind that the political class here is highly fractious, with opposition having become a lifestyle (and livelihood) for some. More than 80

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political parties are registered in Chad. Loyalty still tends to develop around local and tribal leaders. Opposition figures range from those like the Prime Minister, who have accepted cabinet positions, to those like the non-MPS members of the ERC and CENI, who have accepted formalized "opposition" slots on government organs, to elected representatives of opposition parties in the National Assembly, to political dissidents in Chad (often associated with the media or legal profession), to dissidents who have felt the need to become exiles abroad, to armed rebels. Many opposition parties joined in a boycott of Chad's 2006 elections, and some key figures are already threatening to boycott elections in 2010 and 2011.

¶12. (SBU) Dissident groups have a tendency to stage electoral activities to which they invite the international community at meeting times of the CENI and ERC, in an effort to force Chad's partners to choose between supporting government-sponsored initiatives and rival efforts. There is consensus among the international observers group that we should offer advice and technical assistance so that the CENI can function more effectively; that we should help the ERC remain viable and encourage its efforts at civic education; that we should continue to press for the lifting of formal restrictions on press freedom so that more public debate can occur as elections approach; that we should encourage compromise and coalition-building on the part of the opposition; and that we should support continued reintegration of returning rebels and members of the Chadian Diaspora into political life.

COMMENT

¶13. (SBU) The strong personal and very public commitment of

President Deby to the electoral process is particularly significant because although his constitutional position will be not affected by the 2010 polling (whatever the result), his political position will definitely impacted by the results of local and legislative elections. We believe that President Deby seeks credible 2010 elections both to burnish his democratic credentials with the international community, and to solidify his own political position within Chad. This means not only strengthening his ability to win another presidential run in 2011 (if he chooses to run) or to hand-pick a successor (if he does not), but also reinforcing his position within his own Zaghawa ethnic group, Bidayet Clan, and Itno family, from which he draws his influence but from which could come the most serious threat to his own hold on power. END COMMENT.

¶14. (U) Minimize considered.
NIGRO